

Books of The Times

By CHARLES POORE

"TALE OF A WHISTLING SHRIMP,"* by Vladimir Grinoff, is a satire on Soviet life in the Orwellian manner. It makes appropriate reading, while the Kremlin gremlins continue their game of Russian roulette for supremacy—and the really top Soviet dog bays the moon.

Mr. Grinoff was born in St. Petersburg, escaped from Petrograd and would find no cordial welcome today in Leningrad. He was educated in Virginia, where he became as deeply attached to the Confederate tradition as John Mason Brown. He is a consultant to the United States Government on Russian affairs. This gives him new, endless material for tales of the grotesque and the arabesque.

He reads the Soviet papers and other publications with the seriousness of a political analyst and the delight of a born satirist. What he finds there is rich in paradox, as well as more sinister or more preposterous elements. All these find their places in his lethally amusing novel.

The title comes from Nikita Khrushchev's oracular remark that the big prison state of the Bolshies will abandon communism when the shrimp learns to whistle. Maybe there'll be a cocktail set of shrimps learning to do just that when one of the spudnik's fellow travelers takes to the air. Or perhaps the followers of Lysenko might arrange the matter without the use of rocket power.

A Plot, Soviet Style

The central situation in Mr. Grinoff's novel concerns a pretty girl who is—or, rather, was—what you might call a Premature Anti-Stalinist. Her father is a banker (a *people's* banker, of course) who through shrewd manipulations had built himself into a spectacular state of prosperity and gracious living in a provincial town not far from Moscow. Unhappily, there are envious enemies anxious to pounce and snatch away his lavish possessions the minute they can pin upon him charges of being a deviationist, a wreck-er, a tool of the imperialist warmongers and a crypto-capitalist. Et, as the poet said, cetera.

Then his undergraduate daughter, Simochka, makes in public a few choice, ribald remarks about the sacred system and there is the devil to pay. There are, in fact, several devils the father, Taras Tarasovich Popugaev, has to pay. With chill visions of Siberia looming, he labors frantically to square himself, to save Simochka, who sometimes couldn't seem to care less, and himself, above all.

To quiet, at least temporarily, the voracious opposition, T. T. Popugaev parts with nearly everything he holds dear. The secretary of the party organization gets his television set. The colonel in charge of the secret police gets his best horse. Another demon bureaucrat gets his grand piano. The powerful friend in Moscow who promises all the help in the world—in the future—meantime gets possession of his country house, a dacha of impressive rural charm.

There are also more devious birds preying. There is the fellow who wants to open up a



Vladimir B. Grinoff

race course, but needs a certain amount of fiduciary support to disguise it as part of a coal works. He gets it. There is a student self-government type who could cause a lot of trouble for Simochka if charges of party disloyalty were pressed against her. He gets all the best books in T. T.'s library. In no time at all his estate is very nearly liquidated. Only the news from Moscow that there is a brand new, if evanescent, party line really proves helpful. For even the girl who introduces Simochka to American styles turned out to be a counter-spy.

Satire From the Source

The rubrics that adorn Mr. Grinoff's chapter heads show where he got some of his material for satire.

This one is from "Soviet Russia" (Moscow), Dec. 9, 1956:

"Bribery is a dangerous phenomenon and it must be eliminated."

This one is from *Izvestia*, March 23, 1948:

"In [one area] alone, there were over 1,000 cases of violation of financial discipline."

This is from the *Large Soviet Encyclopedia*, Vol. 35, 1955:

"Only Marxian dialectic materialism formulates the correct understanding of psychology."

This, so to speak, at the heart of the matter, is from "Problems of Love and Marriage," a pamphlet of the Communist party:

"When choosing a life-mate, the Communist youth should look first for correct political thoughts, and only afterward for education, temperament, health and good looks. True love is somber, intellectual, and definitely revolutionary."

Then there is a 1956 directive from the editors of the *Large Soviet Encyclopedia* telling subscribers how to cut out the article on Beria and substitute for it articles on the Bering Sea and Berkeley. It may take some ingenuity to find suitable articles on subjects beginning with the letter Z when Zhukov is changed in that book.

**TALE OF A WHISTLING SHRIMP*. By Vladimir B. Grinoff. 251 pages. Dutton. \$3.50.